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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR
HYDROGEN ECONOMY, OTHER ENERGY ISSUES

REF: PARIS 1008

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY. Not
for Internet distribution.

1. (U) Summary: South Africa's Department of Science & Technology (DST) has begun to play a stronger leadership role on research and development (R&D) issues in energy. In the upcoming months, DST will take the lead on key USG-initiated energy initiatives, establish a new National Energy Research Institute and develop a national R&D strategy and action plan. End summary.

2. (SBU) EST Officer met on April 12 with Department of Science and Technology (DST) Director for Resource-Based Industries, Dr. Boni Mehlomakulu, to discuss DST's role and interest in energy-related research and development. Dr. Mehlomakulu said that a "single utterance" in a Cabinet meeting in mid-2004 about "who knows what the Americans are doing on hydrogen?" generated a great deal of high level interest in the issue, and led to follow up briefings and DST's taking on a leadership role.

3. (U) Dr. Mehlomakulu said that DST is now concentrating on several aspects of energy research policy, in coordination with other government departments. The first is to establish a National Energy Research Institute (NERI) before year-end. NERI will coordinate most R&D activities in energy, and will focus on supporting research for the public good, in particular, meeting energy needs of the rural population. The lead on nuclear energy research will remain with the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME). NERI will work closely with existing research institutions, such as the Energy Research Center at the University of Cape Town, and will identify ongoing efforts and analyze gaps in research that need to be addressed. NERI will locate its offices in Johannesburg's Rosebank suburb, joining the site of the Central Energy Fund and related energy organizations. Over time, DST hopes that NERI will develop into an equivalent to Mintek, a parastatal that carries out applied research in minerals and metallurgy.

4. (U) DST also is working with DME to develop a National Energy Research & Development Strategy and an accompanying Strategic Action Plan for Energy. These documents will identify priorities and help in mobilizing funding from Treasury and other sources for energy research.

5. (SBU) DST will also take lead responsibility for South Africa's participation in the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum and efforts to join the International Partnership for the Hydrogen Economy. Dr. Mehlomakulu noted that late last year she received approval to do a "baseline study" for hydrogen/fuel cells research, which led to efforts to develop a road map and strategy to present to Treasury for funding support. She indicated that South Africa will not reapply for membership in IPHE until it has further developed its strategy and identified funding sources, and is in a position to "do it right"-probably not until some time in 2006. She noted that her Minister voiced embarrassment over how DME had handled the application letter submitted to the IPHE Secretariat in January 2005 (Reftel).

6. (SBU) DST and the South African Fuel Cells Initiative (which she described as a loose grouping of interested parties who mostly complain about the lack of SAG funding and strategic thinking on fuel cells) are jointly hosting a South African Hydrogen/Fuel Cell Indaba in May 2005, targeted at high level officials. USDOE has been invited to make a presentation. DST's goal is to raise awareness and generate feedback from academia and corporations on energy research priorities. Later in the year, Dr. Mehlomakulu hopes to organize a study tour to the United States for a group of South African representatives; EST Officer offered to work with Washington agencies to help identify useful contacts and facilitate meetings.

17. (SBU) The Department of Minerals and Energy retains its lead on nuclear energy. Dr. Mehloimakulu said that DST will continue to play a supportive role, particularly relating to the science & technology aspects of the Pebble Bed Nuclear Reactor. She affirmed that DME has kept DST informed of bilateral negotiations on U.S. proposed R&D agreements on nuclear energy and nuclear materials safeguards technologies.

18. (SBU) Comment: DST's stepped-up engagement on energy R&D is a positive development. Although it is a young department and is still building capacity, DST is relatively apolitical and results-oriented. DST usually works well with other government departments, given the cross-cutting nature of science and technology.

9.(SBU) Brief bio notes: Dr. Mehloimakulu is young, competent, and ambitious. She joined the Department of Science & Technology in 2003. She studied engineering at university, and said her passion was catalysis. She has never visited the United States but her husband, an environmental scientist with KPMG, studied there. She previously worked for energy company SASOL, first at the company's chemicals complex in Sasolburg, in the Free State Province, and later at Johannesburg corporate headquarters in SASOL Oil's strategic planning group, but said she left in part because her white male colleagues resented her and created a hostile and negative work environment; she said she hopes to make her mark elsewhere and eventually return to SASOL at a higher level in the future.

FRAZER